

she's complicating the process  
I have 15 minutes  
to get her there  
gas up  
& return the cab for the night man  
the meter's on  
I try to get a coherent answer  
she doesn't like my tone I guess  
out she goes with her clanking bags  
the end of another perfect day

45

at that age  
Hemingway was liberating France  
Céline had 2 major novels out  
Bukowski was consolidating  
Sinatra was forming his own record company  
Bogart was making To Have & Have Not  
my father lost everything he had  
my mother sat in divorce court  
I just can't stop  
pounding on these keys  
turning out words  
for a few crumbs of encouragement

#### I DIDN'T KNOW

it was all new to me  
there was the ad  
12 famous writers all grouped together  
they had made it  
I hadn't read any of them  
but that didn't matter  
all I had to do  
was send them a sample of my writing  
they'd let me know  
if I had potential  
I filled out the application  
& sent one of my poems  
a couple of weeks later  
I heard from them  
they could see my potential  
once I had completed the correspondence  
course  
there'd be nothing  
standing in my way  
the course was only \$600  
I didn't send them any money



in fact  
I was no longer interested  
a couple of weeks later  
the bell rang  
I wasn't expecting anyone  
a gray haired guy came up the stairs  
full of false cheeriness  
I didn't like him  
he asked if he could sit down  
I listened to his pitch  
he asked me for some water  
a little annoyed that he had to ask for it  
he referred to writers as "scribblers"  
that was another turnoff  
I was only 22 at the time  
he probably thought  
that he could overwhelm me  
with his seniority  
but it was evident  
that he was no writer  
just a rather cranky salesman  
my decided lack of interest  
only made him press even harder  
he must've really needed a sale  
the contract was turned in my direction  
he had taken a pen with black ink  
& made a star  
over & over on the same spot  
it looked ugly & desperate  
I was supposed to sign on the line  
where he had inked in that star  
both his hands were across the table  
clenched in fists  
I didn't sign  
& he wasn't any happier  
the school later received  
some bad publicity  
& quietly disappeared  
that salesman probably  
scarred every member of his family  
for life

#### "FAMILY VALUES"

leave it to a politician  
to corrupt the language  
with a built-in abstraction  
what does it really mean?  
mom n pop n the kids  
sitting in front of the set  
watching 101 Dalmations?